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SUBJECT: IRAQI PRESIDENT CONCLUDES TWO-DAY VISIT TO JORDAN

REF: AMMAN 3231

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Jordanians and Iraqis have characterized Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's two-day visit to Jordan May 7-8 as a success. The two sides pledged to cooperate even more closely on security and counterterrorism. Talabani told a local daily that the U.S. military presence is still needed in Iraq to defend against foreign terrorists that are coming from other Arab countries "not including Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait." Foreign Minister Zebari said he hoped the "issue" of Ahmad Chalabi could be solved; privately, the King told Charge the GOJ has established a back channel with the new DPM to deal with the matter. In a further sign that relations are on the mend, Iraq's Ambassador to Jordan, who was recalled to Baghdad in March after a Jordanian was reported responsible for the Hillah suicide bombing, returned to his post this week. The King told us Talabani was very usefully focused on ending infiltrations from Syria, had gained a wariness of Tehran, and saw reinforcing the state's security institutions as a primary task. End Summary.

SECURITY COOPERATION TOPS THE AGENDA

12. (C) Security cooperation and fighting terrorism topped the agenda during Iraqi President Talabani's two-day visit to Jordan May 7-8. In comments that were carried widely by the local media, King Abdullah affirmed that bilateral relations were moving forward: "We are determined to remove all obstacles that could impede progress of these relations and Jordan is keen on building close and strong relations with the new Iraq." For his part, Talabani said in an interview with Arabic daily al-Rai that his talks with King Abdullah on May 7 were "excellent," saying that Jordan and Iraq see eye to eye on the need to enhance bilateral ties, security cooperation and combating terrorism. The King echoed this assessment in private, telling visiting General Abizaid and Charge on May 9 that his meetings with the Iraqis were very positive, and that he was pleased that the Iraqis chose Jordan for their first official visit in the region. The Jordanians will follow up with the Iraqi defense minister to discuss in detail military cooperation, according to the King, including the possibility of offering excess military equipment to the Iraqi forces. He mentioned that his letter to President Bush, carried to Washington by new National Security Adviser Saad Kheir over the weekend, underscored Jordan's commitment to encourage the ethnic groups of Iraq to work together and to generate a counterweight to Iranian influence. The King said that Jordan was doing its best to tamp down mosque rhetoric that praised the "resistance" in Iraq, commenting that the virulent rhetoric came from elements opposed to his own leadership as well.

13. (C) Foreign Minister Zebari, who accompanied Talabani, told reporters after meeting acting Foreign Minister Alia Hattough-Bouran on May 8: "We believe that there are many terrorist networks which are taking advantage of the current situation in the region and trying to maneuver their way in Iraq. These groups are coming from the outside and we want to magnify our security cooperation to combat them." Talabani told al-Rai that U.S. forces must remain in Iraq to prevent "external interference" and to stabilize the country. In a veiled reference to Syria, he said there was "tremendous and unlimited external interference," adding that insurgents in Iraq receive financial aid, training and media support "from some Arab countries, which do not include Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait." Privately, the King told Charge that Talabani related that his first priority is to engage Syria on this matter.

14. (U) Talabani on May 8 also met with PM Badran, chamber of deputies Abdul Hadi Majali, and Senate President Zeid Rifai. In a further sign that Jordanian-Iraqi ties are on the mend, Iraq's ambassador to Amman, Ata Abd al-Wahab, returned to Jordan on May 7 after he was recalled to Baghdad for consultations in the aftermath of reports that a Jordanian citizen was responsible for a suicide bombing in

Hillah.

GOJ WORKING ON THE CHALABI "ISSUE"

15. (C) Talabani told al-Rai that he discussed the issue of new DPM Ahmad Chalabi, convicted by Jordan's State Security Court in 1992 on bank fraud charges, with King Abdullah during his visit. "(Chalabi) played an opposition role against Saddam Hussein's dictatorship... I asked His Majesty to politically solve the issue and, I think, Chalabi wants to resolve the matter in a satisfactory way to both sides." Separately, Zebari told reporters that he hoped the "issue" of DPM Chalabi could be resolved. "Chalabi is now a leading member in the Iraqi government. He was elected and we look forward to settling this issue. We want to resolve the matter without any embarrassment to either side." Privately, the King told Charge that the Jordanians have set up a "back channel" with Chalabi and are trying to figure out a way to deal with Chalabi's fugitive status in Jordan, as well as come up with a mechanism to forgive his outstanding debt in Jordan. A complicating factor, according to the King, is that Chalabi owes more than \$300 million to private individuals, not institutions. He said that he was heartened to hear from Talabani that he (and apparently Chalabi as well) now seemed to have shifted and begun to recognize Iranian interference in Iraqi affairs as a problem.

IRAQIS IN JORDAN PRAISE THE VISIT

16. (C) Several Iraqi contacts resident in Jordan lauded the Talabani visit, and praised the King for his outreach to the Iraqi leadership. They said the King's efforts would go a long way in countering the support among many ordinary Jordanians for the "resistance" in Iraq. An Iraqi working for a German development organization in Jordan told poloff that he is much more optimistic about the future of Jordanian-Iraqi relations now that the King has come out very publicly in support of the Iraqi Transitional Government. He believes the tide is turning against support for the "resistance" in Jordan, in large part due to the King's efforts. However, he warned that the lack of security in Iraq looms over everything. Yasin Elewy, an Iraqi businessman who met with Talabani during his visit, said Talabani struck him as a simple man, but "hard as nails," and one who would "stand up" for Iraq. He viewed the King's efforts to intervene with the Jordanian press (ref A) as necessary to protect Iraqi interests and also to move the bilateral relationship forward. This upbeat reaction was echoed in the Jordanian press. In a view echoed by numerous commentators, al-Rai chief editor wrote an op-ed piece that Jordan and Iraq were opening a new positive chapter in their relationship.

17. (U) Minimize considered.

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